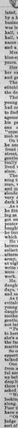

The Times
PHILADELPHIA, SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 5, 1890.

THE Mystery of No. 21

BY MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH, AUTHOR OF "ISHMAEL,"
"LOST HEIR OF LINLITHGOW," ETC., ETC.

> "Grim reader! Did you ever see a ghost?"
> *Byron.*

IT WAS one of the oldest landmarks in the city. It stood at the end of a very narrow, crowded street leading to the East river—on the north side, facing south. It was a strong, old, gray-stone building of two stories, with a Dutch roof and a double front door, opening into a broad hall that divided the building.

At the time of the mysterious occurrence about to be related, the whole ground floor was occupied by a hide and leather dealer as a place of business. The west half of the upper part was let in single rooms to lodgers. The east half, separated from the other by a broad hall, was occupied by a poor widow of the name of Rose, her youthful daughter, Mabel, and a young boarder, Charles Manners.

Mrs. Rose was a little, plump, fair, rosy, blue-eyed and yellow-haired blonde of 38 years.

Her daughter, Mabel, aged 18, was like her except in the items of a slimmer form and gayer spirits.

The two women made their living by stitching chamois gauntlets and leggings for the dealer on the ground floor.

Their boarder, Charles Manners, was a young Georgian, "ruined by the war," who had come to New York about a year before to find work, and after incredible discouragements, difficulties and perseverence on his part, found work as a city reporter on one of the smaller newspapers and as "super" on any stage where an army or a mob might be temporarily needed.

On the first day of his arrival in the city he answered an advertisement of "A nice front room on the second floor of 21 —— street, with board and lodging for a single gentleman," and, references proving mutually satisfactory, he engaged it, and had lived with Mrs. Rose and her daughter ever since.

The motherly widow had from the beginning taken a kindly interest in the young man, who was very attractive both in person and manners. He was of medium height, slender, graceful figure, dark complexion, very dark brown hair and moustache and dark hazel eyes.

As well as his limited means would allow, he fitted up that front chamber for working as well as for sleeping. As soon as he got employment he sold his fine gold repeater—sole relic of his "better days"—and bought a first-class typewriter, upon which he immediately began to practice, and on which he soon became an expert.

He was a very industrious worker; and between running about in the morning to collect news, going to the theatre in the afternoon to rehearse, fighting with the army, or shouting with the mob on the stage at night, and sitting up until nearly dawn to write up his articles, his days and nights were very full, and indeed crowded with work.

He saw nothing of his landlady or her daughter except at meal times or on Sundays, when he walked with them to church and sat with them in the free seats.

As the days passed one natural and inevitable event happened—the handsome young journalist and the widow's pretty daughter fell in love with each other. The mother saw it with dismay; but she was a gentle, weak, tender creature and she did not interfere with their inclinations.

"Poor things! Poor things!" she sighed to herself. "He's a good young man and she's a good girl, and I'm not going to fly in the face of Providence! He made love and marriage; I didn't!"

So on Sunday evening, and on every other opportunity, the young people walked and talked together without hindrance.

One Sabbath evening when they came in from a walk, both looking happy, but bashful and anxious, the young man led the girl up before her mother, who sat reading by a drop light on her little table; and then and there told of his love for her daughter, and asked her consent to their marriage.

"Well," sighed the widow, "I have been looking for this. I have seen it coming all along. I have nothing to say against it. Poor things! Poor things! May the Lord have mercy on you."

"Oh, mother! mother! that is what the judge always says when he orders another sort of knot to be tied!" laughed Mabel.

This was their betrothal, which threatened to be a long and a trying one.

But the unexpected was at hand.

One morning, as Manners was going out of the street door on his usual quest for "local items," he met the postman, who handed him a letter and passed on his way.

Manners stopped and gazed at it in surprise. It bore a foreign postmark, and he had never received a foreign letter in his life before. He broke it open. It was from a London firm of lawyers, enclosing a bill of exchange for a hundred pounds sterling and giving information that fairly took Manners off his feet. He forgot all about "local items," indeed, he had an item of his own worth more than all he was likely to collect that day.

He turned back and hurried up stairs to the room where the two women were washing up the breakfast dishes, and exclaimed:

"Oh, Mrs. Rose! Mabel, dear! Here is a surprise! My great uncle, George Preston, of Preston, England, has died and left me a legacy of five thousand pounds. Only think, twenty-five thousand dollars!"

"Your great uncle!"

"A legacy!"

The women spoke simultaneously.

"Oh, yes! And I must go to England immediately. His solicitors have advanced me a hundred pounds for contingent expenses."

We pass over all the exclamations that followed. It was settled that Manners should sail in the first steamer bound for Liverpool, and that immediately after his return the young couple should be married, since then there would be no reason for the delay of their union.

"But if anything should happen on the voyage?" most indiscreetly suggested the widow.

Mabel turned pale, and looked piteously at her lover.

He laughed the idea off, patted the girl on the shoulder, and gaily replied:

"Oh, if there should be a catastrophe, I will come back from my watery grave and give you a warning on my type-writer. For, Mrs. Rose, you know that you said when you were upbraiding me for working all night on it, that you believed if I should die you would still hear me tip-tapping on that machine. So now if I should go down at sea, or anything else should remove me from this material sphere, I will return in the spirit, and you shall hear me at work as usual."

He spoke so gaily, so mockingly, so laughingly, that both women laughed with him, for there was not the faintest shade of superstition in either.

They had awful cause to remember this conversation. However, no prevision of coming horror was before them now, but on the contrary, a very busy day.

Manners went off to notify his employers of his intended voyage, to purchase his ticket and a few necessaries, leaving Mrs. Rose and Mabel to pack his valise—a task which they voluntarily assumed.

The next morning, soon after breakfast, Manners started for his steamer. Mrs. Rose and Mabel walked with him down to the pier where the steamer lay, went on board and remained by his side on the crowded and noisy deck until the peremptory order, "All ashore," compelled them to take a hasty leave of the young man, whose last words were that he would keep a diary of his voyage, mail it as soon as the ship reached Liverpool and thereafter write to his beloved by every mail until he should embark for home.

Mabel was on the verge of tears.

"Now, don't cry! I shall have plenty of salt water between here and England without you contributing any," he said so cheerfully that she arrested the tears about to fall.

"God bless you!" were the last mutual benedictions before they parted, and the two women were hurried along with the crowd of people who had come to see friends off, and were now crossing the gangway plank to the pier.

When the signal bell rang Mabel sprang up as if she had been struck, exclaiming:

"Oh, mamma! how dreadful it sounds! It seems fatal! I feel as if it was Charlie's death-knell, and that I shall never see him again—never again!"

"Hush, child! That's all nonsense. You must trust to Providence and look forward to his return."

II.

When they reached home the two women went to Manners' hastily-vacated room and set everything in order.

"He has left his type-writer open; he forgot to close it. And, see, here is a fresh slip of paper which he always puts in after he has finished writing at night so that it may be ready for use in the morning," sighed Mabel.

They put the machine in its case and carried it up to their own bed room, where they placed it upon a side table.

Mabel soon recovered her cheerfulness and began to look forward to her lover's first letter. It came a day or two sooner than she expected, and rejoiced her heart with the news of his swift and easy outward-bound passage.

After this letters came from Manners almost every day for a week. And then came the final letter written on the eve of his embarkation on the steamship Alda, bound from Liverpool for New York, in which he said by way of postscript:

"It may be, if we have favorable weather, that I will arrive in advance of my letter."

From that moment all was excitement in the widow's home. Every careful, affectionate preparation was made for the reception of the homeward-bound voyager.

The day wore away, but no Alda was reported. The next morning dawned, but still no Alda.

Mabel was impatient, but not anxious.

Before night on that fatal Friday an awful equinoctial storm gathered and broke over land and sea, and raged with unusual violence. Disasters at sea were reported almost every hour.

But no news, good or bad, came of the missing Alda, now several days overdue.

Mabel was distracted—demoralized. She could neither eat, work nor sleep. Day and night she would walk the floor, wringing her hands and raving.

At length her mother had to treat her as she would have treated a fractious and suffering baby. She gave her a good dose of paregoric, which, as the girl was quite unaccustomed to the drug, effectually quieted her excitement. For the first time in several days she allowed herself to be undressed and put to bed like an infant. And there she lay perfectly serene, though not asleep.

The poor mother, now that her child was calmed, resigned herself to slumber for the first time since that terrible storm had convulsed the air, earth and ocean.

But Mabel lay in tranquil exaltation, which was as delightful as it was wonderful to her.

Presently, as she lay entranced in that blessed calm, she heard a sound in the silent room that almost caused her heart to cease its pulsations. Listen!

Click-click, clicker-click, click, click, clicker-click. . . .

She held her breath, sat up in the bed, and bent forward.

The gas had been turned low in the room, which was, therefore, dimly lighted; but yet it served to show the typewriter on the table before the window, still undisturbed in its case, yet the sound of operating distinctly audible. The motion was irregular; rapid and short runs, and then slow and separate clicks.

Click-click, click . . . click . . . click . . . clicker, click . . . .

If it had not been for the controlling influence of the drug, Mabel must have been frightened half to death. All she felt now was a profound awe, that produced a quietness of body and mind like that of a trance.

It was all clear—solemnly, awfully clear now. The Alda had foundered at sea in that terrible tempest. Charlie had gone down with the rest, and yet he was not dead! He had come back as he promised to warn them of his fate. He was even then writing a message on that closely covered machine where no mortal hand could possibly slip in.

Awe calmed her like death. She would not wake her mother, but some subtle sympathy stole into the woman's sleeping senses and disturbed her. She sat up in bed and asked:

"What is it, dear?"

"Mother! Listen! Listen!" whispered Mabel.

Click-click—click-click—click-click—click, went the machine.

"Heavenly powers!" breathed the mother in an expiring tone.

"He is drowned, mother, but he is living. He is here. Listen!"

Click-click—click-click. Click-click.

"I hear!" gasped the widow.

In another moment both women were out of bed, standing before the covered machine, which was still slowling clicking.

"Let us take off the cover," suggested the widow.

"No, no, wait! Wait until he stops!" muttered Mabel!

"He has stopped now," whispered her mother.

They unstrapped the case, and raised the cover between them, turned up the platen, and saw a line written.

"Heavenly powers! Heavenly powers!" panted Mrs. Rose.

"Oh, turn up the gas! Turn up the gas, and let us read it!" gasped Mabel.

Mrs. Rose went and did as requested, and illuminated the room. Then she returned to her daughter's side, and they read the line—or rather failed to read it, for it was unintelligible to them.

Here it is:—

J9) ioc MP ZphuyedvaFD BX : : vse $ (3uz

"What does it mean, mother?" muttered Mabel.

"I don't know," she whispered back.

"Oh, mother! mother! How awful!" murmured Mabel.

"We hear of such things every day in the so-called spirit seances, but I never believed in them—never," breathed the perplexed and mystified widow. "I know if spirits could come back, your poor dear father would have come to us!"

"But he never promised to do so, mother, and Charlie—" Here her voice broke down in spite of the opiate. But she recovered and went on, solemnly whispering: "Charlie did, you know. He promised faithfully, if anything should happen, to come back and write me a message on the typewriter."

"He was joking," said her mother.

"But here is the evidence. Can't you believe your ears and eyes? We both heard the clicking of the machine and you see the writing."

"It is perfectly unintelligible."

"Mother, it must be spirit writing. Let us take it to-morrow to that medium in the Bowery—it is not far off—and see if she can interpret. I shall not have a minute's peace until I know what it means."

Mabel was growing so excited again that Mrs. Rose hastened to promise all she asked, and finally persuaded her to go to bed again.

The next morning they took the paper off the machine, and carried it to Madame Blanke, a medium, of whose powers they had heard many wonders.

The medium lived on the third floor of a tenement house, whose lower floor was occupied as a liquor saloon.

When the two women climbed up the stairs leading to the medium's apartments, they found themselves before a door bearing the sign:

MADAME BLANKE,
Spirit Medium and Clairvoyant.

They rapped and were admitted by a small child into a front room, carpetless, curtainless, and containing only an old walnut table and a few ricketty old chairs standing around it.

They were asked to sit down until the medium should be at leisure.

"I don't half like this," exclaimed the widow as soon as the child had left them.

"Oh, mother, it's the only way to find out what we want to know," sighed Mabel.

Further conversation was prevented by the entrance of Madame Blanke—a short, fat, red-haired woman with a bloated face.

Mrs. Rose introduced herself and her daughter, and would have proceeded to open the business on which they had called, but Mabel impulsively took the matter out of her hands, and very indiscreetly gave the woman her cue by telling the whole story of her absent betrothed lover, the missing ship and the mysterious message on the typewriter, producing the unintelligible line and handing it to the medium.

III.

Madame Blanke, holding the paper to her forehead, closed her eyes and seemed to go off into a trance. Breathing heavily and speaking in a sepulchral voice she said:

"This here message is wrote in the sperit's langwidge, where a single letter 'll stan' fer a whole word, or even for a—a——"

"Paragraph," suggested Mable.

"Yes, a paragraph or a sentence, 'cording to its siterwation. This here line means this: B'loved o' my soul, I'm allers near you, though my body lays at the bottom of the sea, food fer fishes, and—"

"Woman, stop! Don't you see?" exclaimed Mrs. Rose, starting to help her daughter, who had sunk back half-fainting in her chair.

The medium came out of her trance and brought a bottle of what she called "camphire" for the girl to smell.

"Oh, mother! Let us go home. Hope is dead. My heart is broken!" sobbed Mabel as soon as she could speak.

Mrs. Rose paid the medium her dollar fee and took her child home.

The first act of Mabel was to put away the "spirit message" with her carefully-treasured letters from Charlie. Then she put a fresh sheet of paper in the machine, saying to herself:

"He may want to write to me again, and his messages are all the comfort I can have until mother and I go to where he is."

Then she threw herself down upon the bed in the collapse of nervous prostration.

Widow Rose was almost at her wit's end. She did not believe in Madame Blanke; but the loss of the Alda, with all on board, was now an accepted fact in the city. The mysterious line written on the machine was also an undeniable fact, as well as a profound unfathomable mystery. And here was her poor child—her one ewe lamb—as much overwhelmed by the horror of the supernatural as by sorrow for her bereavement. Widow Rose was one of those tender-hearted creatures who are always ready to give or seek sympathy in any trouble. That same day she told her story to every woman in the house; and, first of all to Charlie's colored laundress, old Aunt Juno, who happened to call that morning to inquire if they had heard from the "youn' gemman."

Juno's comment and counsel were alike characteristic. When she had heard the story, she summarily disposed of the mystery by declaring confidently:

"Doane yer bleibe a word ob it, ma'am. All Sam's (Satan's) works. Nuffen 'tall but Sam's works. Sam's got inside ub dat dere mersheen, sho's yer boane. Yer take an' heabe dat dere cussed, infunnely fing, yight outen de windy. Yer do it, fo' yer hab dat dere youn' gal yip stavin' kazy an' jown herse'f, or set de house afire, or sumfin. Yer heah me good, doane yer?" concluded Aunt Juno, as she took up her clothes basket and went away.

Mrs. Rose shuddered. She had not herself been free from fears of her daughter's sanity, but she was undecided as to what she could do. Of course she never thought of throwing poor dear Charlie's typewriter out of the window, but she thought perhaps she might steal it away while Mabel slept, and lock it up in the garret cuddy.

At length, while Mabel lay prostrated on the bed in the upper room, she called all her neighbors from the other side of the house into her sitting-room and told them the whole story.

Her listeners were all women—the men being away at work—and they were filled with wonder, amazement and curiosity to witness the marvel, if it should be repeated that night.

So it was decided that after supper, when the house would be quiet, the neighbors should meet in the haunted chamber and there await the possible coming of the ghostly typewriter. Punctually at 10 o'clock a small company of women met in the upper room, where Mabel lay on the outside of the bed in a deep sleep of mental and physical prostration, and where the possessed typewriter stood on the little table.

They seated themselves and waited in a deep silence of awe, curiosity and expectation. They all sat perfectly still and gazed upon the machine as if fascinated by it and its mystery. It was not yet 11 o'clock. The room was still as death, when suddenly one of the younger women muttered with suppressed excitement:

"Listen!"

"Oh, just hear it!" whispered another.

"Oh, my! Oh, dear!" gasped a third.

"Hush, hush, for heaven s sake! Don't breathe more than you can help," pleaded the widow, in an almost inaudible tone.

Click-click—click-click — click-er-click — click-click—click click went the machine, low, soft, and clear at intervals.

They were spell bound as they listened, gazing with dilated eyes and open mouth at the instrument working without a hand near it. At length one nervous girl began to sob and cry; and just then the sound of the clicking keys suddenly ceased. Nor did it recommence.

"A discordant element in the circle, Maggie, you have spoiled it all. You shouldn't have been let to come. You shan't another time," said Maggie's grandmother to the sobbing girl.

"I don't want to; I don't want to; never no more," protested Maggie.

And as the machine remained perfectly silent for the hour that the curious women waited, one of them said at last:—

"He has done writing. Won't you take off the cover and let us see what he has written?"

"I am sorry, but I cannot. The message, if there is anything in it, is for my poor child, and is sacred. After she has seen it, she can show it to all of you if she pleases."

With this the visitors had to be content, and they bade the widow good night, and left the room to sit up late and talk the matter over, and then keep their husbands awake until morning, discussing the mystery of the typewriter.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

The Mystery of No. 21

A Thrilling Ghost Story by Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth.

CHAPTER IV.

The next morning Mabel was better. The night's rest had refreshed her. The first thing she did was to go to the typewriter and open it, and draw the paper out with its line of mysterious writing. Here it is:

"Ooi hlge draJ FASt ($56! uzok NOGU9 ocuye."

In great excitement she rushed to the head of the stairs and called her mother, who had left her fast asleep an hour before, and had gone down to the kitchen to get breakfast.

"Mother! Oh, mother! Come! Come quickly? Here is another message! Oh, what a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful thing!"

Mrs. Rose ran up stairs and took the paper Mabel handed her.

"Dress yourself, my dear, and come down to breakfast," was all she said.

"But oh, mother, this marvelous, amazing thing that happens to us! Who can doubt that the dead return to us?"

"Come down to breakfast, my dear; you have eaten nothing for several days, and I have cocoa and rice cakes for you."

"Mother, I couldn't eat anything until I find out what this message is. Let us go to the medium at once," pleaded Mabel.

"And have you fainting away again? Child, the message may be genuine as it stands, but that woman can't interpret it," said Mrs. Rose.

But Mabel persisted with tears and sobs that threatened to break into hysterics, so that the distressed mother had to yield so far as to promise to go and fetch the woman to the house if only the daughter would eat some breakfast.

Mabel complied as well as she was able to, and immediately after the meal was over Mrs. Rose went out to bring the medium.

The performance of the day before was repeated with very little difference. The interpretation was very like the one of the previous occasion. The lost lover was often near his beloved, in the spirit, if her eyes could only be opened to see him. He was also preparing a beautiful home for her in the spirit land.

Mabel had been tremendously excited during the interview, and when, at last, the medium went away a dollar richer, the poor girl dropped down on the bed in another collapse.

Mrs. Rose was in despair and half inclined to follow the old darky's advice and "heave dat fing out'n de windy," or lock it up in the garret.

Meanwhile the report of the ghostly operator on the typewriter spread through the neighborhood and all over the city, and excited the eager interest of all the spiritualists who heard of it. Crowds came to the house to make inquiries.

The excitement was at its height when one fine, bracing morning Mrs. Rose got her daughter up and dressed and asked her to go down and sit with her in the bright and cheerful front room that had once been Charlie Manners' apartment. She established the pale girl comfortably in the deep armchair and seated herself beside her with a gauntlet on which she was securing the ends of the seams.

"Oh, what a selfish and self-indulgent wretch I have been, mother. Give me that work. I am not strong enough to sew on the machine, but I can finish the ends of the seams while I recline here," said Mabel, holding out her hands.

It was a sign of improvement that Mrs. Rose was very glad to see, and she promptly gave the gauntlets into the girl's hands, while she herself went and dragged in her sewing machine from the next room and sat down to work.

"It is the best thing you can do for yourself, my dear, else I would not let you attempt it. Occupation is the best remedy for a troubled mind."

"It is the right thing, anyway, mamma."

Here was another good sign; Mabel had not called her "mamma" since the sorrow came, but always "mother."

While Mrs. Rose was secretly rejoicing over this, they heard a ringing step rushing up the stairs, and a cheery voice exclaiming: "Where are you all? I hear you talking."

Mother and daughter both started to their feet.

"Oh, here you are," cried the same glad voice. And Charlie Manners burst into the room—Charlie Manners in flesh and blood. Very fine flesh and very rich blood, if one might judge by the fresh ruddy complexion and sparkling eyes of the young man.

Mabel uttered a gasping cry and was caught in his arms before she could sink to the floor.

"Why, what is this? Mabel, my girl! Oh, how white and thin she is! Mabel, Mabel! Has she been—oh, has she been ill?" cried the young fellow, with a sudden change from joy to distress, as he supported the swooning girl in his arms.

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie! Is this a miracle? We thought you were lost," exclaimed Mrs. Rose simultaneously with his anxious questions.

"Mabel, Mabel! Look at her," panted the lover.

"She is overcome with a shock of joy. She will come round and be all right presently," said Mrs. Rose, bringing a glass of water which she put to the lips of the girl.

With a great effort of self-recovery, Mabel succeeded in swallowing a few mouthfuls of water.

"Thank God! Oh, thank God. Oh, Charlie, Charlie," she breathed, as he placed her again in her armchair and knelt before her.

"We thought you were lost. Everybody said the Alda had sunk in that awful storm," said Mrs. Rose.

"Well, she came very near it. Mabel, my dearest, are you better now?" he tenderly inquired.

"I am well and happy now. Oh, so well and happy now that I could die of joy," breathed the girl in a low, faint voice.

"And so am I," exclaimed the widow a little incoherently. "So delighted to see you safe at home after all our groundless mourning. How in the world did you escape? It seems like a miracle."

"Almost a miracle, indeed. Our ship was tossed and tumbled, rolled over and over and was beaten and battered and all but wrecked in that tempest, and reached port against all odds and probability in a very shattered condition. Doubt if she is not done for. But Mabel, sweet, you have been ill. Ah, I know you have," he said, changing the subject as he still knelt beside her chair and chafed her cold, thin white hands in his own.

"Only with grieving after you, Charlie—nothing else. Now that you have come she will pick up fast enough," exclaimed her mother with a smile.

"Oh, but I am well—quite, quite well now," feebly murmured Mabel. "But the typewriter, mother," she added, with a mystified air.

"The typewriter? What about the typewriter?" brightly inquired the young man, thinking that the machine had been sold, or stolen, or injured, and determined to make light of the misfortune.

"Mabel, tell him all about it. I must go into the kitchen and get dinner," said the widow, as she smilingly left the room.

Manners rose, drew a chair to Mabel's side, seated himself, and inquired again:

"What has happened to my old comrade, the typewriter?"

"Oh, such a strange, mysterious, wonderful thing, Charlie," she answered; and then she told him the story with every detail.

Manners laughed aloud.

"Oh, how can you make light of it, Charlie? Such a terrible, mysterious thing!"

"Possess your soul in patience, my sweet, until to-night at the hour of the ghostly writer's visit, when I think I can unravel the mystery," he answered, still laughing.

And then, though she questioned him eagerly, he insisted on deferring his explanation until he should be able to demonstrate its truth by unmasking the ghostly operator in their presence.

After this they talked of his visit to England; his legacy, and their future plans, until Mrs. Rose called them to dinner.

Mrs. Rose was deeply curious when told of Manners' promise to reveal the mystery of the haunted typewriter, but she was enjoined by Manners to keep the secret until after the *denouement*.

That night at half-past nine o'clock the three went upstairs to the chamber where the "possessed" typewriter stood on the little table, and where the gas was turned low.

"Now, there is nothing like demonstration. Dear Mrs. Rose, please sit here close to the gasburner, and as soon as I give the signal, turn the gas on full. Mabel, sweet, sit here near this right hand side of the machine, and when I give the signal, watch closely the back of the cover. Pray, both of you, be still as death. Here I will stand in front of the machine, and at the right time will raise my hand."

The three took their positions, and the room was as still as a deserted vault. They waited about half an hour with exemplary patience, when the usual soft sound of the keys, lightly, slowly touched was heard. They waited until the sound ceased. Mrs. Rose had her fingers on the gas key. Both women had their eyes on Manners, standing before the typewriter. He raised his hand. Mrs. Rose turned on the gas. Mabel fixed her eyes on the back of the machine. Manners put his hands on the cover to lift it, but before he could do so, a "tiny, little beastie" slipped out from the back of the machine, down on the floor and out of sight under a bureau.

"Why, it's a mouse!" cried Mabel. She was the only one who had seen, or could have seen, the sly, swift little sneak-thief as he glided away, nor could she have done so had she not sat just where she did and kept her eyes on the spot where he appeared.

And this was the reason why the mysterious operator had never before been detected.

Mrs. Rose stared in silent astonishment.

Charlie laughed aloud as he said:

"There! the mystery is out—literally out! Sorry to spoil a good ghost story, but 'truth is mighty, and must prevail!'"

"How did you guess it was a mouse?" inquired Mrs. Rose.

"Because I happen to be acquainted with that little gentleman, and I know his ways and his manners. He lives somewhere between this floor and my ceiling, and he used to come down to pick up any crumbs that might fall from my midnight luncheons, which were generally eaten by me while seated at the machine. Now look here," he said, lifting the cover of the typewriter and showing them a small hole near the bottom of the case. "Here is where he got in; and now come and look down at these crumbs of cheese that have fallen between the keys, and through the bars to the bottom of the machine. These crumbs are what he was after, though he could never get them. But with the perseverance worthy of a mouse he has tried it night after night, I suppose!"

"Yes, indeed, night after night," asserted both women.

"And now I must give the machine a good cleaning and arrange Mr. Mouse's restaurant in some more satisfactory place," concluded Manners.

My story is told. I can safely leave it to the imagination of my readers to picture to themselves the simple wedding that made the young people and the widowed mother so well content; and the cottage at High Bridge, with its garden and poultry yard, that was the delight of the mother, and the stable and the one-horse carriage that was the treasure of all.

THE END.